

Silhouettes

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Category: Akagami no Shirayukihime

Genre: Friendship, Romance

Language: English

Characters: Obi, Shirayuki

Status: In-Progress

Published: 2016-04-13 19:55:30

Updated: 2016-04-13 19:55:30

Packaged: 2016-04-27 18:37:33

Rating: K+

Chapters: 1

Words: 4,046

Publisher: www.fanfiction.net

Summary: Modern college AU. When Obi meets Shirayuki, he knows she's someone different, and it's not just because she's blind. Shirayuki doesn't need to see to know that she's found something special in him, too. Together they navigate social stigmas and their unlikely, budding friendship.

Silhouettes

_Hey, guys. I feel a little sheepish, since I'm sure everyone's expecting an update on _The Automaton Heart. _But I swear, I was just minding my own business, writing literally three prompts at once for the one-shot collection, when I was hit with the strongest urge to write this very random modern AU fic about a blind Shirayuki. Yeah. So in less than three days, I cranked out 3000+ words about it. Worst case scenario, this will be a three-shot, and I'm not going to go through and heavily edit these chapters, since I'm not particularly concerned about them. It really is a super random idea, but cute nonetheless, and interesting, since Obi is taking on my perspective on the blind community - meaning, he and I both know pretty much nothing about it. I liked the huge contrast Obi and Shirayuki would make in this situation - Shirayuki, small and blind with a kind but slightly fiery, hardworking personality; and Obi, strong and athletic with nothing holding him back, but laid-back and cool to go with the flow. They're both misunderstood by most people around them, just for completely different reasons. So, most randomly, here's the fic._

**Warning:** I am not blind myself, nor do I know anyone personally who's blind, so if anything in this fic offends someone, please forgive my ignorance. I did do a fair amount of research before I wrote it, and I have family and friends who've been close with blind people and told me a lot about them, so hopefully I represent Shirayuki pretty accurately here. If I was more knowledgeable, I would have written from Shirayuki's perspective, but I'm not, so Obi it is. _

_Credit goes to Akizuki Sorata, the creator of _Akagami no Shirayukihime.

Happy reading!

* * *

><p>Part 1: Tuesday and Thursday<p>

"Mr. Obi? A word, please."

"Sure." Obi rose from his seat yawning and stretching, letting the other students jostle him on their way out of the classroom. He slipped easily through the stream of bodies to reach his professor.

She raised an eyebrow at him. "I see you didn't see fit to bring _any_ materials to class. Once again."

He smiled disarmingly. He sat in the front row of the lecture hall to keep himself awake, but it did have its drawbacks - like letting the professor see everything he did. Or didn't do. And remember him for it.

Before he could respond, Professor Garrack sighed. "Well, making no reference to your preparedness for my midterm, it could very well pay off for us today."

"How so? My imagination is positively racing."

She cracked a smile at that, then pointed out the double side door to his left where the last of this section's students were filing out into the hallway. "My next class is Advanced Concepts of Botany, and I have a student coming who needs to be escorted inside."

Obi, who'd been stretching out his shoulders with his hands pressed to the back of his head, paused and frowned. "Huh?"

"I would like you to go out into the hallway, find the student, and escort her to her seat here in the lecture hall," Professor Garrack enunciated crisply. "Oh, you'll have no trouble finding her - she's always very early, and she's a small girl with the loveliest red hair."

"Okay, but, Professor -"

"Ah, yes, her seat. She sits in the same seat _you_ always sit in, as a matter of fact, right up front. Though not for the same reasons, I'm sure." She turned and pointed at a cabinet in the wall behind her desk, next to the towering wall of sliding whiteboards. "Once you've helped her find her seat, please take a thin, blue textbook out of that cabinet and bring it to her. Will you do that, please? Normally, there was another young man who went and got her every day, but he unfortunately had to drop out of the previous section, so I mean, will you do this every Tuesday and Thursday for the remainder of the semester?"

Oh.

What?

Obi's mouth popped open, and all of his confusion came out in one, garbled sentence. "But Professor - why does she need to be _escorted_?"

In the moments of Obi's silence, Professor Garrack had begun stacking folders from Obi's section and storing them in unseen, sliding shelves behind her desk. Now, she paused, straightened, and regarded Obi with the same, steady look she used in only two situations - confronting idiots who showed up to her class high as kites, and gauging a student's reaction to a particularly difficult assignment, chastisement, or issue.

For absolutely certain, she was trying to judge his character with one look. Obi's spine straightened unconsciously.

And maybe, but probably, she was thinking that he was really, really dumb.

Her more flexible eyebrow arched once more. "Because she's blind."

* * *

><p>That hadn't been fair at all.<p>

"How was _I_ supposed to know?" Obi muttered to himself, hovering in front of the double doors and craning his neck to look into the mass of students milling about the hallway.

He wouldn't have hesitated to agree - or asked questions - if he'd known from the get-go that she was _blind_. It was kind of hard to refuse selfless service to someone in actual need, after all.

A someone with a disability.

"Now, I'm sure you have the time to give," Professor Garrack had said, "since I see you loitering around the building so often after my class. It's only a few minutes twice a week, after all. And with no books or pencils or laptops to cumber your arms, it shouldn't be a problem, right?"

And what else could Obi have done but say "right" back?

So he'd agreed. And now here he was.

And he was feeling very much out of his element.

But as he shouldered his way gently through the press of students, some of them fighting their way against his current to get around him and get down the hallway to the classroom, he found he didn't have much more time to reflect on either his dazed confusion or his potential incompetence, because there she definitely was, ahead of him at the mouth of the hallway.

The hair was the first thing he noticed - short and fairly straight, falling halfway between her chin and her shoulders. There was no way he could have passed by crayola-crayon-red hair like that twice a week and not remembered it, and now he realized that he had seen her several times before, but never really looked; either out of

disinterest or simply not wanting to be one of Those People and stare at her head too hard and too long. Now he noticed a few other things - how thin she was, and how pale. And also, the white cane clutched in her left hand as easily and lightly as the latest fashion accessory.

She stood near the center of the end of the hallway, looking unsure as the river of students split in two around her, like she was a vibrantly mossy rock in the middle of a stream. It would be ridiculous, Obi thought, for him to assume that she was lost. Blind or not, she'd been coming to this class twice a week for the last three weeks - without a doubt, she knew where she was by now. She was probably just waiting for whoever it was that usually came to meet her.

However, immediately, Obi had a problem.

How to approach her?

It seemed stupid to even slightly overthink it. Even if he didn't know the most kosher way there was to get a blind person's attention without scaring them half to death - if such a tried-and-true method even existed at all - she probably wouldn't mind him just doing whatever he usually did to greet any other human being.

Except, you know, waving. Which was exactly what Obi's first instincts were telling him to do.

Biting back the giggles at his own stupidity, Obi waded closer to the girl, and then, once he was a few feet away, he spoke up in a clear voice that he hoped reached her through the babbling roar of the dozens of students still clogging the hallway.

"Hey, Little Miss - with the red hair!"

It worked. Her head swiveled around, red hair swinging, and her eyes, hidden behind smoky, non-reflective shades, apparently fixed right on a spot just below his eyes, where his voice was coming from.

"Yes?" she said back.

Emboldened, he took a few steps closer. "Professor Garrack sent me to - uh, to get you." The word "escort" was not going to fly right now. "The guy who usually comes had to drop out of her class."

"Yeah, I know." She closed the distance between them, taking larger, more confident steps toward him than what he'd expected she could take, sweeping the tip of her cane a hair's breadth above the floor in one, brief arc. "He told me Professor Garrack still wanted to send someone else."

She didn't look pleased at that; her lips pressed together into a thin line, and Obi felt suddenly unsettled, like he'd stepped into a room where he obviously didn't belong.

"Uh-huh," he said neutrally, shifting his weight uncomfortably. He really had no idea what he was even doing here. "Yeah, I'm Obi, by the way."

Her expression changed instantly, like she was catching herself. She smiled and stuck her hand out for him to shake, a little higher than normal for handshake elevation. Yet never once did her line of nonexistent sight vary from its chosen spot - a space on his throat below his chin and just slightly to his right. "Hey, Obi. I'm Shirayuki."

He chuckled, caught off guard, and when he took her hand, her grip firmed tightly in his. "Good to meet you, Shirayuki."

Her smile turned to a sunny grin. "And I really am blind, by the way, to save you the trouble of asking."

Obi stared down at her, thunderstruck. "Uh - thanks?"

She laughed; a high, clear sound. Her hand squeezed his even tighter.

"No problem." She let his hand go, so he let go, too. "Guess we should go in, huh?"

Obi checked over his shoulder. Almost no one else was in the hallway with them now, and as he watched, a lone student slipped out of sight between the double doors. "Oh, right." He wasn't looking forward to facing Professor Garrack's searching stare again, but he couldn't make this girl be late for class.

Later, he wasn't sure what made him say it. It really was just his personality.

But he looked back at her, took a big step out of her way, made a grand gesture that of course she couldn't see, and said cheerily, "Lead the way, Little Miss!"

There was a pause. His stomach clenched, poised to plummet straight to his toes.

His mouth had picked the wrong venue for once and for all.

Then the girl pitched her head back, and that high, tinkling laugh made its second appearance, but in earnest this time.

"Don't mind if I do," she said, and giggled once more - and then she promptly did lead him all the way back down the hallway to the double doors, where she took hold of one door handle, pulled it open, and held it open for him.

Obi re-entered the classroom with his jaws around his knees.

* * *

><p>Their very interesting and would-be innocent entrance did not go unnoticed by Professor Garrack. She stared at Obi with wide, disbelieving eyes the whole time they made their way to the center section of the first row, walking side-by-side rather than with Obi leading, as the professor had likely expected.<p>

Really, Obi was just along for the very interesting, and very confusing, ride.

Obi pulled up and stood aside as Shirayuki let her hand hang down when they reached the middle section; she brushed the turned-up edge of the bottom of the first seat, then brushed each seat in turn as she passed, until she finally counted her way to Obi's usual seat, where she deposited her small backpack. Then, putting her cane into action, she carefully felt her way around the professor's large desk - gracefully, really, without groping around even once; her cane tip felt for the desk's legs while her free fingertips brushed the edge of the desk - and beelined straight for the cupboard the professor had pointed out to Obi earlier. Shirayuki's fingers brushed over the surface of the wood for a moment until she felt the handle, grasped it, and pulled it open. Then she reached inside, felt around for a second, and soon pulled out a thin, blue textbook with translucent edges of wax paper sheets sticking out everywhere. Without pausing, she shut the cupboard and made her way back to her seat the way she'd come, finally plopping down into her seat with book in hand. She balanced it on the edge of the seat attached to the right of hers, then grabbed her backpack from where it rested at her feet, unzipped it, and fished a laptop and headphones out of it.

While she flipped up the attached desktop and started arranging her workspace, everyone watched her flabbergasted. With one exception.

Obi had decided just minutes ago that he wasn't going to be doing anyone any favors by acting surprised every time this girl did something. Clearly she was capable, and none of the people in this room realized it.

Professor Garrack cleared her throat. "Well, Obi, thank you. You can go. Shirayuki is our best and brightest student -" The room rumbled with laughter; all the other students knew it to be true. "-so I think she can take it from here."

Funny, Obi thought, since the girl had just then handled herself with the greatest of ease in front of everyone. He looked over at Shirayuki from where he'd perched himself on the edge of a seat; she looked vaguely to her left, almost in his direction, but not quite. She didn't know exactly where he was. But if she'd known, and she could see, Obi knew that they probably would've exchanged the funniest of looks.

"I don't know," said Shirayuki slowly, with fake trepidation. "With how much trouble I had with the homework last night -" Awkward laughter from the other students version 2.0. The homework really had been a doozy. "-maybe he should stick around and give me some pointers. Anything would be better than how I did."

Professor Garrack chuckled, absolutely tickled pink at the wittiness of her obviously favorite student, and just like that, Obi's mouth chose its moment once again.

"Careful, Little Miss." Her head swiveled in the direction of his voice. He looked at her, grinning hugely. "If I do that, it'd be the blind leading the blind!"

Instantaneously, the room was a vacuum - all air, all noise, all life sucked right out of it in the blink of an eye. Dead silence answered him from every scandalized face.

Then Shirayuki started laughing so hard, she cried.

The rest of the students soon followed suit, realizing that no harm had been done. But even as laughter rocked through the room, Professor Garrack stood looking speechlessly between Obi and Shirayuki.

Shirayuki must have guessed what her professor was thinking, because she gasped out, "It's - it's okay, Professor Garrack! That - that was - oh, my _gosh_, that was _exactly_ what I needed today!"

With that, Obi started laughing, too, shoulders jumping and his hand pressed to his mouth.

He couldn't believe this girl.

When he'd gotten control over himself again, he called over to her, "Happy to help, Little Miss!"

"Are you really going to keep calling me that?" she asked, still chuckling.

His eyebrows shot skyward. He rarely put himself on first-name basis with anyone. "Well, what should I call you?"

"By my name, of course!" Her smile was bright under her dark glasses, and he was probably crazy, and it was probably from all that laughing anyway, but Obi could have sworn that her cheeks were glowing red. "Just call me 'Shirayuki.'"

And that was how things began.

* * *

><p>When Thursday came, without waiting for Professor Garrack's go-ahead, as soon as the bell rang and she formally dismissed the class, Obi was immediately out of his seat and practically running for the double doors.<p>

Tuesday had been a singular day, to say the least. He'd been thinking about it constantly all through Wednesday up until now.

That girl, Shirayuki, was seriously, _seriously_ something else. His curiosity over her positively burned despite himself, and now that the moment had finally come again, all he wanted was to see what she would do when she saw him again, for better or for worse.

When he slipped through the double doors, she was already at the mouth of the hallway, waiting for him.

* * *

><p>"So who are you, exactly?" she asked.

They leaned against the hallway wall, watching students fight their way past one another, going in opposite directions. Or he did, at least. Shirayuki listened.

"Hm... well, everyone just calls me Obi. I go to the same university you do. I have the same biology professor as you..."

"She's a botany professor for me, actually." Shirayuki was smiling again, like she couldn't help herself, and Obi was feeling lighter on his feet than he'd felt in years. "So where are you from?"

"San Diego."

"What do your parents do?"

"I was in foster care most of my life," he said evenly, gently. "I had a few parents."

Shirayuki didn't miss a beat. "What do your most recent parents do?"

He grinned. "He's a civil engineer, and she's technical support for this university."

"So what do you want to do?"

"Haven't decided. Now you, all of the above, but you're more interesting than me, so you get to take more time."

He watched as Shirayuki flushed with embarrassment and straightened her back against the wall. "How much longer do we have?"

Obi checked his phone. "Seven minutes?"

"Okay, we've got time." She shrugged, shoulders scraping against the wall. "Let's see - I'm from here, but I live, like, four hours away. I was born blind, and I learned to handle myself pretty early on - I'm an only child and my dad was always gone for work, and my grandparents were, you know, older, so I had to."

"And your dad is a...?"

"Detective. He really likes his work."

"And your mom?" he asked quietly.

"She passed away when I was really, really little."

"So what are you studying here?"

Shirayuki grinned at his shoulder. "I want to be a botanist - study plants."

Obi had no clue as to why anyone would want to spend their life with plants, but he shrugged. "Professor Garrack says you're the best student, so I guess you picked the right profession, huh?"

"Plants have just always made a lot of sense to me. Plus, I've had a garden since I was something like six. I can just smell and touch each one and know which ones they are and how they're doing. I think being blind actually kind of helps!"

But you can't even see them, Obi thought. Not even flowers.

"That's pretty convenient, Little Miss."

"Shirayuki. Or I'll come up with a nickname for you, too!"

"Fine." He grinned. "Shirayuki." His chest tightened oddly.

"Better." Her grin softened into a little smile. "You have a nice voice."

Dizziness hit him, and Obi almost choked on air - he was quick to change the subject. "So who usually came to pick you up before... you know, me?"

"My friend, Zen." Her voice took on an odd tone as she said his name. "He got too busy with the business he's running with his brother, so he had to trim down his schedule a bit."

"Okay, but seriously - why does Professor Garrack insist that someone escort you to her class all the time?"

Shirayuki snorted and quickly covered her mouth, abashed. "_Escort_"

"Yep, you know, that's the exact word she used."

"Oh, boy." She rubbed her face, the side of her hand pushing her sunglasses up her forehead, but her hand still blocked his view of her eyes; the sunglasses soon fell back into place. "It's just - Obi, I really have no idea. Well... I sort of do. I'm pretty sure Zen told her that she should make sure someone always comes to get me before class starts. And he was always leading me around and getting things for me, so that's all Professor Garrack has ever really seen of me."

"But _why_?" Obi insisted. "He's your friend - he knows you can take care of yourself."

"He's protective. He wants me to be comfortable." She paused, and Obi waited, and then she tucked her chin in a little. "And sometimes, he sticks too close."

"Hm."

"I don't know if he trusts that I can do stuff for myself. Even though he's seen that I can. It's kind of... frustrating? Maybe that's not the right word."

"So, in short," said Obi, lifting a finger, "he wouldn't appreciate the things I keep saying all that much."

She laughed - which had been his goal - and the atmosphere quickly relaxed. "Nope, he'd probably challenge you to a duel or something!"

Obi chose to dismiss that as a joke, though she sounded completely serious. He shifted a little closer to her, his heart already fluttering dangerously with what he was about to say. He'd been planning to say it since Tuesday night. "Little Miss - Shirayuki - hey, do you maybe want to -"

And immediately, the one-minute warning bell rang.

Shirayuki startled terribly, nearly dropping her cane. Obi had to make himself not grab it and steady it. "Oh - sorry, Obi, but I should get inside -"

"Right, sorry. Let's hurry, Shirayuki!"

They did hurry, Obi reaching the doors first and pulling them open because he just moved faster. But when they got to the front row of the middle section - Professor Garrack really frowning at them now, as Shirayuki was the latest getting to class as she'd ever been - Shirayuki set up her desk and let Obi get the blue textbook for her.

He made his escape just as the final bell was ringing, cursing his own terrible timing.

He hadn't been able to ask her what he'd wanted. And now he wouldn't see her until Tuesday.

Except that Saturday chose to intervene.

* * *

><p>So there you have it - basically an introduction on Obi and Shirayuki with a rough idea of their situations in life. I don't like bogging stories down with too much background information, especially in this case, since I'm unabashedly focused on Obi and Shirayuki's relationship. Hopefully you guys can still follow the story okay.

Seriously, please review tell me your opinion of this first chapter! I'm still not sure why I wanted to write this fic so darn badly, but the AnS fandom needs every story it can get, I guess. So I hope you enjoyed this chapter!

Part 2 will be called "Saturday." Let's just say you Obiyuki fans won't have to wait too long for some serious development. At the soonest, the next part should be posted in a couple days, and at the latest, in a week or two, since I go back to school next week and things are about to get REAL crazy for me, but writing is how I chill out, so I'll still do plenty of it, no worries. :)

Stay beautiful,

-ISM

End
file.